

**Remarks as delivered by ADM Mike Mullen
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Adm. Mike Mullen: Well, thank you, and good morning. It is – it is actually somewhat overwhelming to come into an audience like this where I know so many people, and not the least of whom, believe me, influence my life like Larry and Patty Blumberg who have been dear friends of ours for lo these many years. And I know Larry, Pete Hedley and many others who care greatly about what we do as a Navy and what this area, what the San Diego city and area means to us. And I know they have worked for years to make sure this relationship thrives.

And so I – to this day, Larry, and Patty, and Pete, and many others, in particular – particularly Larry and Patty, we are indebted to you for your friendship and your love, and encouragement. And Larry Blumberg is a lot of things, and some of them I won't talk about. But he is someone who influenced my life greatly, and is a reminder that all of us are in both need of people who care about us and bring us along, and we have that responsibility as well.

There are numerous young men and women here in uniform not at the flag level, and I actually would like to ask them to stand, if you would. Midshipmen, right up. Now, in all of the things that I do, I am every day mindful of the sacrifices of our people not just in the Navy, but in our military services, including our Coast Guard around the world.

And none of us – none of us should forget this morning as we enjoy this opportunity, and it is a special one indeed, with all of the electricity in the area, and all of this camaraderie and friendship, that there are men and women in harm's way around the world literally this moment who are sacrificing and in some cases dying for our ability to do this.

And the essence of what makes me tick is captured there. They have never been better, and I'll talk about the Navy today principally, but I have never had – the privilege of serving has never been more important to me to serve these young people, who as we as a nation, we have asked them since our founding to bear the burden of the kinds of challenges that we faced from then through today and I believe we'll face for the foreseeable future.

So always try to keep – I always try to keep them in mind. I met yesterday with a group of retired flag officers, and part of the reason I wanted to do that and one of the reasons I really am delighted I could be here today is because I think it is important to make sure we're engaged not just with our retired flag officers, but with all of those who care about the Navy and our armed forces as an institution and try to let you know what is going on. And it's a pretty fast pace. Everybody's lives these days are. Things move pretty quickly, and things keep changing. And I will – if those who were there yesterday at lunch will permit, I would like to just repeat a story I told them.

Earlier this week I sat in my office back in Washington, and we selected four sailors of the year. And these were E-6s, senior petty officers who will soon be promoted – actually today will be promoted to E-7 because they have been selected as the best of the best. And all four of those individuals have recently served in combat. And one of them is a SEAL who has got four kids, another one on the way. We pulled him off deployment so we could promote him, and he is on his third or fourth or fifth deployment, and he lives here. He is actually in SEAL Team 7.

And I have been around the SEALs a lot in recent years, over the last 10 years, and this guy is as good as we have obviously. And he also was struggling a little bit whether he should stay at sea or take a break and come to shore for a while. The reason I bring that up is because obviously his spouse is an extraordinary woman raising these four children while he has been gone. And it is so important to have that balance right, that we focus not just on the men and women in uniform, but also our families, and that family support. So we had a pretty active discussion about that.

And one of the points I made to him is, this is a long war. This isn't going to be based on the next deployment; we're going to be doing this for a while, and I need him for the long run, not just for the next deployment. It's instructive to me that he was selected as the shore Sailor of the – I'm sorry, the Pacific Fleet Sailor of the Year because of who he is and what he is doing.

There was a reserve Sailor of the year recently back from Iraq who works for Ford Motor Company, and has somehow balanced his life – and I have always admired the reserve because I can never figure out how they can do two jobs; I have always struggled doing one. And yet they seem to be able to do it. They are not just supported by their families; they are supported by their companies, and Ford and many others have been great.

And also what he has done is he has now taken that back, his expertise in seeing the needs for care – healthcare for us, for reserves, as well as active, but certainly reserves who are in Ford and actually in other – in other corporations in Detroit, companies in Detroit, as well as an interface with the Veterans' Administration. Christine Hunter was introduced, Adam Robinson was introduced earlier today, Jim Johnson is here – I have learned a lot about Navy medicine in the last couple of years as well.

And I spent some time yesterday up in Balboa, and it is stunning the evolution of care which is occurring literally right in front of our eyes, and they are taking care of about 90 wounded warriors there, several of them amputees, and adjusting, and the community outpouring to them in support of, whether it's recreation, or how do we help them find jobs, or do we connect with the VA, is really breathtaking. And Christine, I couldn't be prouder of what you're doing or what your people are doing. It is just not – it is – there are some Navy people there clearly, but it's mostly Marines and soldiers who are being attended to there.

So from this SEAL who is the Sailor of the Year to caring for them – and Secretary Gates has been very clear. He said the most important thing we can do right now is get the right

people to the fight. The second-most important thing we can do is make sure we take care of those who are injured in that fight. And so the support that you represent, this area represents, that is going on just locally is pretty extraordinary. And I would just urge you to continue that because it will be needed for some time. And we will continue to evolve.

That is just – so that is one aspect of – a Sailor of the Year that extends to something I see. And isn't – that kind of care just isn't just here; I have seen it Bethesda. I have seen it in Walter Reed. I have seen it in BAMC, Brooke Army Medical Center. I have seen it in Landstuhl, Germany. And I have seen it on the battlefield in hospitals most of us would equate to what we grew up looking at watching MASH as medicine, as lives get saved, and miracles to a degree that none of us would have ever thought possible.

There was another Sailor who was selected as Sailor of the Year, and he was the East Coast or Fleet Forces Sailor of the Year. Fleet forces used to be the Atlantic Fleet Command; we have changed that. He was an EOD. He is one of our explosive ordnance disposal. You may have read in the paper this morning that we have lost two Sailors earlier this week, the Chief and a First Class, both of whom were EOD Sailors. And these Sailors are the leading edge of the threat; they are attacking the leading edge of the threat on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan.

And to put it in perspective, they go out and essentially pre-survey convoy routes, and on average, these Sailors are involved in somewhere between 10 to 20 incidents a day, and they are over there for six – and in fact, one of our – a couple of our units recently were over there for nine months – very high-stress. They are – and I am boastful and very proud of this – they are proud of being who they think – they are the best explosive ordnance technicians that we have in the country.

And every service has them. And this – but this group of Navy technicians have truly been extraordinary. And we need to make sure we take good care of them, and they are in a very high turnaround ratio. Some of them are turning around at less than half the time, deploy time to time at home. And we need to make sure we are focused on their families. So here was another young Sailor who was selected as the Sailor of the Year.

Now this at the time – and the one more – I mention the reserve; I mention the SEAL. The shore Sailor of the Year was a Sailor that is based actually over here at – he is an aviation – an air warfare first class technician who is based at North Island, and who is basically flying missions in support of SOF. Now, that doesn't mean there is not going on in the Navy or in the world, but when the institution recognizes, as I believe it should, those who are principally at the leading edge, and do so sort of across the board, it really reminds me, not just of the exceptional people we have, but of the job – of the focus of the institution right now.

We have got some 61,000 sailors deployed right now around the world. About half of them are in CENTCOM and about half of them in CENTCOM – actually over 13,000 of those are ashore, and that is a dramatic shift. We have stood up – I have learned a lot. I

can tell you that Larry Blumberg and Pete Hedley and Bud Edney, who is another dear friend and mentor never taught me much about Seabees as I was growing up. We didn't –

We had to – as Larry said, just watch the movie; you have got it. Actually, in many ways, it's not – that is not far off, even though the Seabees hate it when I say that because they truly are extraordinary. And they are, as you would know the Marine engineers and half of them, we should be mindful, are located here in California, up in Port Hueneme, and the other half are located in Mississippi where they are wiped slick with Katrina.

And so they were deploying to war trying to find a place to live in the devastation that was their home. And they have been – they have been absolutely extraordinary in everything that they have done. And part of my responsibility is to make sure that we get them in a rotation and that we are poised for the long run here, not just for the next deployment.

Seabees, not unlike the EOD techs, not unlike the SEALs, not unlike many of us here who will just go until we drop, and we can't afford that right now. And in those – of those 13,000 that are on the ground in CENTCOM right now, Sailors now, over 5,000 of those are in Iraq. They run the full gamut, from the Seabees in Anbar who are out west and have been side by side by the Marines, our doctors, nurses, and corpsmen who have just performed, as I said, miracle after miracle. We have got thousands – thousands of master-at-arms deployed around the world. Pre-9/11, we had – we had under – we had about a thousand master-at-arms in the Navy. We are over 10,000 right now.

We have got our first riverine squadron, on the water, up near Haditha and in Ramadi, and they are – all of a sudden, people have looked in their direction and said we need more of that. We have stood up two more squadrons, and I believe there will be more after that because the bad guys can use the water pretty well. And people that have operated in that environment or operated ashore for a long time know that.

So – and all of this speaks to the kind of change that is occurring. At the same time, Nimitz is in the Gulf, as I'm sure you all know well. Reagan recently got back from a very successful deployment, short-fuse deployment, in what we call what is now a brand-new operational readiness cycle, the employment-deployment not just concept policy that we have, which is designed to be able to take advantage of our investments and increase our output of readiness while at the same time making sure Sailors are literally in their homeport 50 percent of the time. It's that balance between the need to obviously go and also that balance to make sure you have got a life when you're back home, and we follow those metrics very, very carefully.

I will go later on today to Tarawa and Boxer, and Boxer just finished and you probably – most of you probably know this, but it should be lost; it was not a routine deployment. It was 8.5 months. Many of us grew up on eight, nine, 10-, 11-, and 12-month deployments. That has a finite end associated with it. We can't sustain that because we won't be permitted to sustain that by our people. And our retention numbers are exceptional and we are in our seventh year of over 50-percent retention for first-term

sailors. Some of the faces I see around here, when we were young, we were happy to have 14 or 15 percent first-term retention. And I – that is a place I never want to go again.

The recruiting numbers are good. Joe Kilkenny was here last night. He is actually in support of the NNOA, the annual NNOA conference, which is ongoing, which is a very important group, a very important conference. And in the people of side of what we're doing, the whole issue of diversity has been a big priority for me. And if you're in business, and many of you are, you know this. Hardly a week goes by that I don't pick up and read an article about the strategic imperative for whatever company, outfit it might be and the strength that diversity brings, and if we don't have that, the message is obvious.

So there are a lot of people in town this week doing that, and our people – and back go Joe Kilkenny who is our head recruiter, we have recruited very successfully for the last several years. But I don't take it for granted; it's a tough market, the Army and the Marine Corps are now out there for an additional 70-plus thousand of the same pool, and we have all got to meet our numbers here as the Army and the Marine Corps gets bigger.

And we have got – and recruiting duty is every bit as difficult as it has ever been, if not more so. And we are sending our best people to do this. By in large, things look pretty good. I can tell you operationally, we have never operated better. I mentioned going to Boxer who was out there eight-a-half months – and the Gulf is a very business place these days, and it will continue to be. I also will go to Decatur later on today, and Decatur had an enormously successful ballistic missile defense shot here a few weeks ago, and the Navy continues on that march and that drumbeat for a very successful, very critical missile defense capability for the future, and the threats continue.

I'm extremely concerned as a service chief and a member of the Joint Chiefs about the Middle East. I know everybody in here is. I continue to be concerned about Iran. Last summer, the war in Lebanon, and the Iranian support of that continued. That very much got my attention. And Iran continues to more than aggravate the situation in many ways, and I think they are a sustaining challenge in that part of the world.

I'm very concerned about the challenges that we have, the stress on our ground forces. The reason that there are so many Sailors ashore in CENTCOM is because I grew up when our military broke, and I grew up when eight, nine, 10-, 11-, 12-month deployments were the norm. And I have been anxious since I took over as CNO to try to relieve as much pressure on the ground as I possibly could when you have ground forces, which are basically doing one-and-one. They are out for a year in the case of the Army; they are back for a year in a many cases less than a year, and the Marine Corps is out basically for seven months and back for seven.

And we needed to relieve that pressure as much as possible, and then we have provided also a tremendous capability. Our electronic warfare officers have made – have saved countless lives because we understand that environment and we have been embraced by

the ground forces in ways that none of us could have ever imagined. We have got some of our best pre-command commanding officers active duty, who command provincial reconstruction teams in Afghanistan. Six of them, their life has changed forever. And believe me, when they go command that submarine, squadron or ship, the stories they are going to tell in their wardroom, they are going to be a little different from the ones you and I told.

And I have believed for a long time, we just can't as a Navy stay a thousand miles at sea and watch all of this happen. We have got too much talent, and that is recognized regularly. So there is a tremendous pace of change, and we are working very hard to try to meet that. Inside Navy, I have had a priority of stabilizing the shipbuilding plan in order to recapitalize the future. And we have basically done that. We will have some challenges, continue to have some challenges. I have talked to a couple of people earlier today about getting ready for LCS here, and we need to do that.

But having that stable shipbuilding plan, the same plan over in the Hill for two years in a row, a very solid relationship with industry and something industry could depend on has made a huge difference. We are now very much in the throws of looking into the same thing – same kind of thing on the aviation side. So we make sure we can build the fleet for the future, has been the biggest challenge for me because of the ups and downs that we have been in before that.

To make sure that we develop 21st century leaders on our people side was – is my second one. And I have talked about the diversity aspect of that, focusing on retention, focusing on recruiting, and recruiting at a time when influencers – and this is something you can help us with in this area – the influencers now are making the decision, so parents, coaches, counselors, pastors.

And they need to know – they need to be exposed. They don't – we don't need to be out there to twist their arms, but like many, many parents, if they don't know, if they base it just on what they read, their advice will not be positive in terms of whether a young man or young woman wants to join the Navy or any other service, and we need them.

So focusing on the people side has also been critical – it always has and it always will. And John Harvey who is our Chief of Naval Personnel, he is the facilitator of many of these things as the Chief of Naval Personnel, but it's all of us. Every leader we have is responsible for these kinds of things. And then thirdly is to make sure that we sustain the readiness that we have.

And so we can push somebody like Reagan and that CSG pretty quickly, and Reagan is not the only example, nor – we will always need that high-end capability, not just because of concerns in the Middle East, and I talked about Iran. We have certainly a vital basin in the Pacific and stability in the Western Pacific is obviously really key. And the signals of more submarines here, the Vinson coming here, movement towards the West Coast, the George Washington replacing the Kitty Hawk next summer in August of '08, and our partner – our Japanese partner has been absolutely shoulder-to-shoulder with us –

the government of Japan, to make that happen. And I was recently there, and that continues to be on track.

So the Pacific region for the long term is not just a growing but a vital, vital region. And in my travels in that part of the world with allies and friends out there, those who are long standing and those who are emerging, like Indonesia, like Malaysia, they are all interested to make sure that that part of the world stays stable. We need a strong Navy; we need a strong Marine Corps. I believe we will – there will be an after-Iraq. And what General Conway and I have agreed on is when that occurs, the message to the Marine Corps is, welcome back aboard let's get underway now, not after a strategic pause of six months or a year because of the capability that expeditionary forces bring and the world that we're living in. So being able to sustain that readiness and continue to operate, and we're able to do that.

So on balance, we are really in pretty good shape right now. But I don't take it for granted. What is going on here – mean, literally this morning with your participation, so many businesses and local community volunteers and people who care about San Diego and care about the Navy and care about our people – I would only encourage you to spread that wealth, continue to engage. We need that kind of support. We need it here, and we need it wherever we are.

[Rear Admiral] Len Hering and I were talking this morning at breakfast about the cost of living, and it's significant here. I grew up not very far from here, so I have been around California housing prices my whole life. And yet, we have got to be able to somehow foster an environment in which our young people can come here to live and be able to carry out the kinds of things – the missions that we are asking them to do.

So innovative ideas on how to do that in the future are more than just welcome. And it's a great thrill for me to be back here and to see – this is the – I guess I understood this as the sixth or seventh year that you have been doing this, Nance, and I very much appreciate your leadership here and the leaders in town who make this happen. We care a lot.

And there is a rumor as well that Navy might be back to the bowl this year. There is a NCAA requirement you have to win six games to qualify. But I assure that you if you saw Navy play BC last year in the bowl, that is the team they are fielding again this year, and they are going to be in pretty good shape. So we look forward to being here in December for that as well. Thanks for all of your support. God bless and take care.